

# Health Advisory:

## Increase in Influenza-like Illnesses in the St. Louis Area

January 30, 2008

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**Health Alerts** convey information of the highest level of importance which warrants immediate action or attention from Missouri health providers, emergency responders, public health agencies, and/or the public.

**Health Advisories** provide important information for a specific incident or situation, including that impacting neighboring states; may not require immediate action.

**Health Guidances** contain comprehensive information pertaining to a particular disease or condition, and include recommendations, guidelines, etc. endorsed by DHSS.

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**Health Advisory**  
January 30, 2008

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**DIRECTOR**

**SUBJECT: Increase in Influenza-like Illnesses in the St. Louis Area**

During the past week, reports from emergency rooms, clinics, and physicians' offices in and around the St. Louis area have indicated an increase in influenza-like illnesses (ILIs). As of Monday, January 28, at least 15 area hospitals have been on diversion. This level of diversion is much higher than normal, and appears related to the increase in ILI cases.

Syndromic surveillance sites have also seen a noticeable increase in ILIs. Because syndromic surveillance systems typically detect influenza (in the form of ILIs) in advance of influenza culture reports, the finding of increases in ILIs may indicate significant increases in influenza cases in the region.

Additionally, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is reporting elevated levels of ILIs in most regions of the nation.

It is important for health-care providers throughout the state to remind patients that it is not too late to receive an influenza vaccination if this has not already been done. Typically, February is the month in which the highest numbers of influenza cases are reported in Missouri.

Persons for whom influenza vaccination is particularly important are:

- All children 6 months to five years of age,
- Adults 50 years of age and older,
- Person 5-49 years of age with underlying chronic medical conditions,
- All women who will be pregnant during influenza season,
- Residents of nursing homes and long-term care facilities,
- Children 6 months to 18 years of age on chronic aspirin therapy,
- All health-care workers,
- Out-of-home caregivers and household contacts of children less than 6 months of age, and
- Any persons who would like to reduce their risk of contracting influenza.

In addition to influenza vaccine, pneumococcal polysaccharide vaccine is recommended for all persons in the following groups:

- Persons 65 years of age and older,
- Persons 2 years of age and older with normal immune systems, who are at increased risk for illness and death associated with pneumococcal disease because of chronic illness,
- Persons 2 years of age and older with functional or anatomic asplenia,
- Persons 2 years of age and older living in environments in which the risk for disease is high,

- Persons 2 years of age and older living in environments in which the risk for disease is high, and
- Immunocompromised persons 2 years of age and older who are at high risk for infection.

In addition to immunization, people can protect themselves from influenza and other communicable diseases by practicing healthy habits such as regular hand hygiene, respiratory hygiene, and staying home when ill.

CDC promotes "Take 3" against influenza this season.

1. Take time to get vaccinated.
2. Take everyday actions to stop germs, like frequent hand washing and covering coughs and sneezes.
3. Take antiviral drugs if your doctor says you need them.

For more information on influenza, see the following Department of Health and Senior Services' (DHSS') websites: <http://www.dhss.mo.gov/Influenza/> and <http://www.dhss.mo.gov/PandemicInfluenza/MedSeasonalFlu.html>. Current influenza activity reports for Missouri are available at <http://www.dhss.mo.gov/Influenza/Reports.html>.

The CDC website, <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/>, has educational materials, information, and U.S. surveillance data..

The following box provides detailed information on persons for whom influenza vaccination is recommended.

**BOX. Persons for whom annual vaccination is recommended**

Annual vaccination against influenza is recommended for

- all persons, including school-aged children, who want to reduce the risk of becoming ill with influenza or of transmitting influenza to others
- all children aged 6–59 months (i.e., 6 months–4 years);
- all persons aged  $\geq 50$  years;
- children and adolescents (aged 6 months–18 years) receiving long-term aspirin therapy who therefore might be at risk for experiencing Reye syndrome after influenza virus infection;
- women who will be pregnant during the influenza season;
- adults and children who have chronic pulmonary (including asthma), cardiovascular (except hypertension), renal, hepatic, hematological or metabolic disorders (including diabetes mellitus);
- adults and children who have immunosuppression (including immunosuppression caused by medications or by human immunodeficiency virus);
- adults and children who have any condition (e.g., cognitive dysfunction, spinal cord injuries, seizure disorders, or other neuromuscular disorders) that can compromise respiratory function or the handling of respiratory secretions or that can increase the risk for aspiration;
- residents of nursing homes and other chronic-care facilities;
- health-care personnel;
- healthy household contacts (including children) and caregivers of children aged  $< 5$  years and adults aged  $\geq 50$  years, with particular emphasis on vaccinating contacts of children aged  $< 6$  months; and
- healthy household contacts (including children) and caregivers of persons with medical conditions that put them at higher risk for severe complications from influenza.

CDC. Prevention and Control of Influenza: Recommendations of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP), 2007. *MMWR* 2007;56(No. RR-6):2.

Questions should be directed to DHSS's Bureau of Communicable Disease Control and Prevention at 573/751-6113, 866/628-9891, or 800/392-0272 (24/7).